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DE RUEHAE #1066 3560843
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 220843Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8612
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 6036
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 2916
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0205
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1274
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1453
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0591
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA SKIRMISH AS THE RUMOR MILL
HEATS UP

REF: A. 191234Z DEC 06 ASMARA IIR 6 908 0104 07
[1](#)B. 191232Z DEC 06 ASMARA IIR 6 908 0103 07

Classified By: AMB SCOTT H. DELISI FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (S) Reports of two separate attacks by Eritrean Defense Forces(EDF) on Ethiopian National Defense Forces(ENDF) (Reftel A and B) in the region of the central sector of the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and the rumors and rumblings in Asmara of an impending war, have increased the level of interest by the local populace in EDF activities and raised questions about Eritrea's intentions. Following the two incidents on November 21 and December 7, UNMEE officials were able to walk the terrain. The evidence gathered, coupled with reports from local residents and the ENDF allowed UNMEE to piece together scenarios for the two events. UNMEE sources reported that on November 21, EDF troops apparently attacked an ENDF post at Mukuatsada village. An exchange of fire ensued resulting in the death of three EDF soldiers and gunshot wounds to two ENDF soldiers. There were no reports that either side took prisoners or of civilian casualties. Subsequently, on December 7, the EDF appears to have launched another attack near the village of K'Sadika, with EDF forces reportedly striking an ENDF post from two directions. The ENDF responded. Fighting continued for approximately one hour and fifteen minutes resulting in the capture, or defection, of one EDF soldier and the death of a twelve-year-old local boy.

[1](#)2. (S) Comment: Asmarinos are speculating widely about "preparations" by the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) for war with Ethiopia and some see indicators, including conscription round-ups, as suggesting war may be around the corner. Such "preparations," however, have been part of life in Eritrea for years and post is not inclined to read too much into these developments. Nor do we believe that these two recent EDF-initiated incidents along the border are precursors to a full-scale offensive or an attempt to seize Badme while the Ethiopians are preoccupied with the challenge posed by the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) in Somalia. Rather we see these two attacks as consistent with the GSE's broader regional calculations. The GSE is closely watching Ethiopia's unfolding conflict with the CIC and undoubtedly hoping that Ethiopia will stumble and Meles'

regime will unravel. These two border incidents)- as discussed reftels -- appear intended to harass and distract the ENDF and to force the Ethiopians to maintain a level of force preparedness along the disputed border, while it seeks to concentrate on Somalia. However, even though the GSE may not be seeking to provoke a full-scale conflict on the Eritrean-Ethiopian border, the risk remains that actions by either side could be misinterpreted and escalate into a more significant military encounter. There is a somewhat delicate balance on both sides of the border at present and, though we doubt either side is seeking a significant escalation, the situation warrants continued careful attention. End comment.

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